

Shifting Boundaries Program and Bystander Intervention Upon Witnessing Homophobic Bullying Among Middle School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the effectiveness of the *Shifting Boundaries* program on increasing bystander intervention in homophobic situations and if the program differs by gender. Bystander intervention while witnessing homophobic bullying was defined as either getting help from others or telling the bully to stop. Scores ranged from -14 to +14, with higher scores indicating higher levels of bystander intervention. Results showed that the program did increase bystander intervention in homophobic bullying situations, with a statistically significant increase in the classroom-only intervention. Gender scores were also statistically significant with male bystander intervention scores less than females while controlling for other variables. Additional research must be performed to continue evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

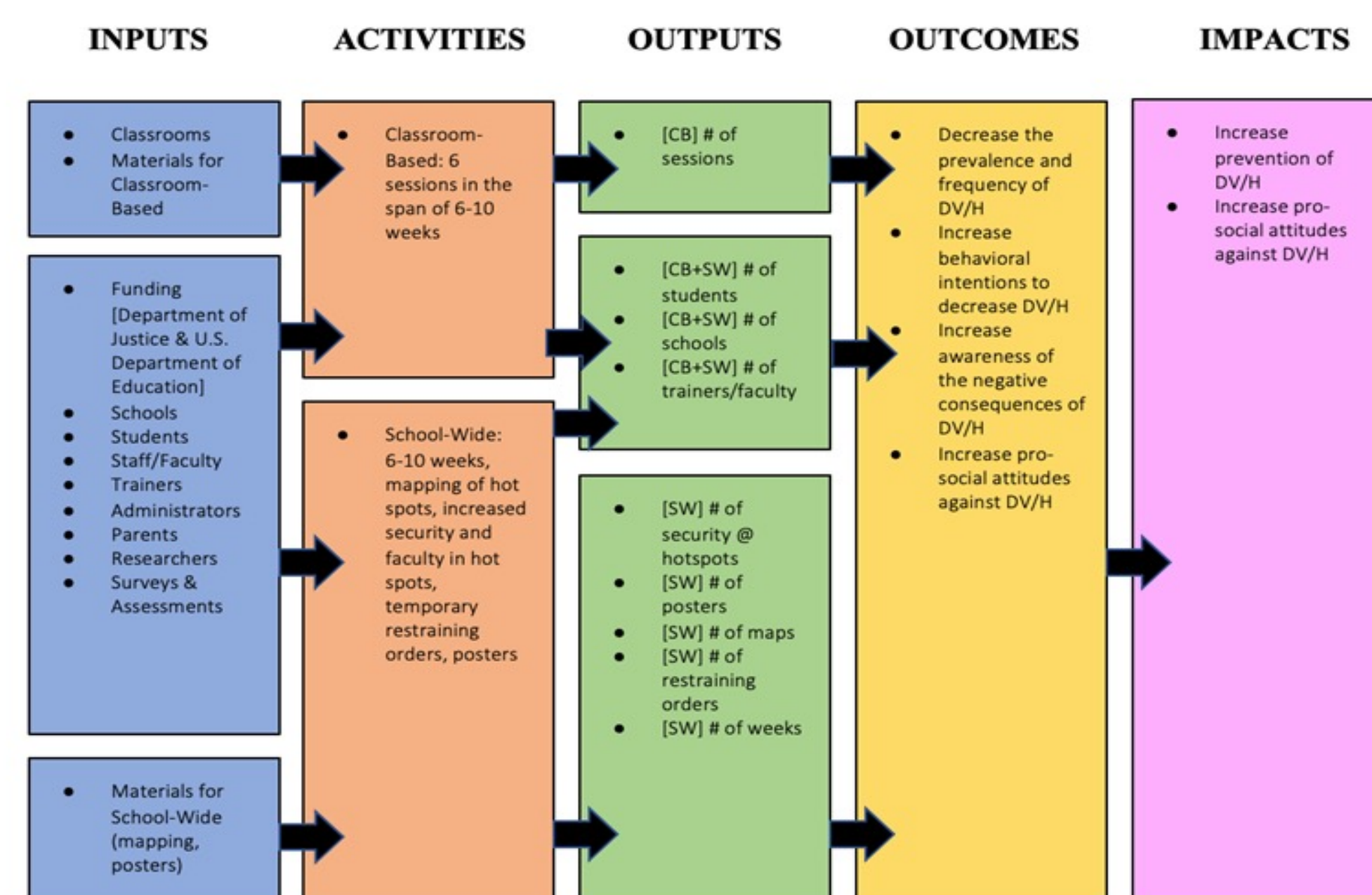
INTRODUCTION

- A six to ten week experimental program in New York City middle schools with 6th and 7th grade students addressing/preventing domestic violence and harassment.
- Students were assigned to “school-only,” “classroom-only” or “both” interventions.
- Over 2000 students were in the program during the 2009-2010 school year.
- The classroom-only intervention educated students on:
 - Consequences for perpetrators of domestic violence/harassment.
 - State laws and penalties for domestic violence/harassment.
 - The construction of gender roles and healthy relationship dynamics.
- The school-only intervention used:
 - Temporary school-based restraining orders.
 - Mapping areas of “hot spots” for harassment.
 - Increased presence of faculty and security in “hot spot” locations.
 - Posters in the school encouraging domestic violence/harassment awareness and reporting to school personnel.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- To what extent has *Shifting Boundaries* increased bystander intervention in homophobic bullying situations among middle school students?
- Does the program differ by gender?

Logic Model:



[CB: Classroom-based; SW: School-wide; DV/H: Domestic violence/harassment]

METHODS

Evaluation Design:

- This study was a secondary data analysis utilizing the set ICPSR #32901: Experimental Evaluation of a Dating Violence Prevention Program in New York City Middle Schools, 2009-2010.
- This was a cluster randomized pretest/posttest control group design with three intervention groups: classroom-only, building-only and classroom/building.

Sample:

- 2655 6th and 7th grade students.
- Schools randomly assigned an intervention.
- Demographic variables were minimal: age, gender and ethnicity/race.
- Asian (16%), Black or African American (31%), White (15%), Other (13%) and Don't Want to Answer (25%).
- Males (47%) and Females (54%).

Variables:

- Measured via survey at baseline and post intervention (six months after the program).
- Dependent Variable: Attempts by a student to intervene upon witnessing homophobic bullying.
- Scores ranged from -14 to +14: “Nothing” (0), “Walk Away” (-1), “Join In” (-2), “Tell Andre to Stop” (1) or “Get Help from Others” (2).
- Higher scores indicated higher levels of bystander intervention.
- Independent Variable: The *Shifting Boundaries* program.

16. Imagine that you are in the school hallway and you see Andre get in Bill's face and call him a "fag" or "gay."

Choose from the list on the right to tell us what you would do if...	Nothing	Walk Away	Join In	Tell Andre to Stop	Get Help From Others
a. Andre is your good friend.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. Andre is not your friend.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. Andre is popular in school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Andre is with his friends and you are alone.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e. Andre is alone and you are with your friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f. Bill is your good friend.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g. Bill is not your friend.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

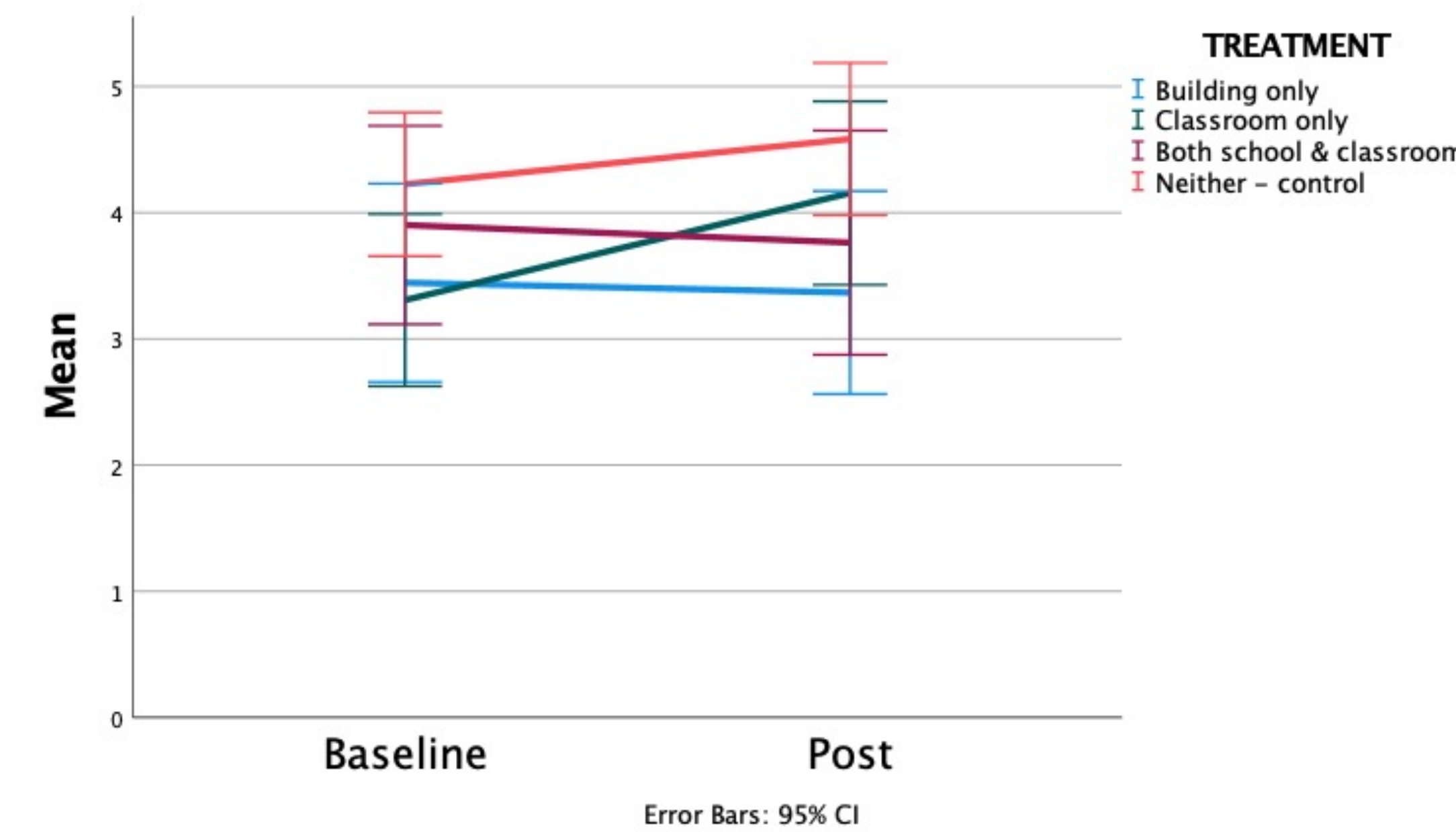
LITERATURE REVIEW

- Harassment almost always occurs in the presence of bystanders, yet only 20% of people intervene. 80% of victimization experiences are witnessed by peers.¹
- Middle school is when youths begin to establish their sexual identity and are the most vulnerable for victimization. LGBTQ+ youths are persecuted at a higher rate than their heteronormative counterparts.²
- The *Shifting Boundaries* program is based on the theoretical concepts of the theory of reasoned action.
- Positive relationships were fostered in both interventions through group discussions with classmates and encouraging youth to become active bystanders with encouragement from well-trained school faculty.⁴
- Classroom lessons were well-received, but some LGBTQ+ students did not feel like they could express their opinion.³
- There are gaps in research showing the effectiveness of the building-only and classroom/building interventions on bystander intervention. This study attempts to reduce the gap of available information.

RESULTS

Inferential Statistics:

- A Wilcoxon signed ranks test compared the baseline and post bystander intervention scores for the students.
- A significant difference was found in the classroom-only group results for baseline and post bystander intervention scores ($Z = 2.30, p < .050$).
- A multiple linear regression was performed to predict a study participant's bystander intervention score at post based on their gender, bystander intervention score before intervention and treatment group.
- The regression model was significant ($p < .001$).
- The results showed that controlling for all other variables, male participants' bystander intervention score was 1.27 lower than female participants' score ($p < .001$).



DISCUSSION

Limitations:

- Weak external validity and generalizability due to the demographic differences between New York City and other more rural areas of the United States.
- Only one question used for the evaluation rather than multiple scenarios/questions.
- Midpoint survey results were not reported.
- Lengthy and repetitive survey.
- Eighth graders were not included in the program.

Recommendations:

- The program should incorporate an LGBTQ+ focus in the program.
- The program should educate students and parents on violence in the home.
- The program should include eighth grade students.
- School size, location and demographics should be considered before assigning interventions.
- The program should include questions regarding students' relationships with faculty.
- The program should ask faculty their perception of the prevalence of bullying on campus.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

- Pupil Personnel Services Credential employees are hired by schools to conduct counseling, psychology, social work and child welfare.
- Shifting Boundaries* can inform social workers on school dynamics and climate.
- Social workers can use the effectiveness of the classroom-only setting to conduct group therapy to change social norms.
- Social workers can collaborate with faculty to include an anti-harassment/bullying component to the syllabi.
- Social workers can hold educational workshops and group therapy for LGBTQ+ awareness.
- School social workers can collaborate with child welfare workers in conducting home visits.
- Social workers can refer students in need of services relating to violent behavior.

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